

Narratives of Academically Successful Youth in Tertiary Institutions from Marginalised Communities

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Language, Identity, and Ideology: High Achieving Scholarship Women

Presentation Outline

- Contextualising the research**
- Research focus**
- Method**
- Findings**
- Discussion**
- Concluding remarks**



CONTEXTUALIZING THE RESEARCH

- Given the eleven official languages and our country's socio-political history, which has, and continues to, divide people along racial, ethnic, and linguistic lines, it would be expected that a great deal of students at all levels of education grapple with negotiating their linguistic identities.
- In this research study, we examine how high achieving women negotiate and construct their linguistic identities within the context of the university's Anglicised institutional culture and against the backdrop of South Africa's multilingual society.
- The 2002 Language Policy for Higher Education legislation mandates that universities introduce multilingualism in their teaching and learning activities (Madiba 2010).
- The Wits' language policy has signaled a shift away from English as the sole language of instruction (Wits 2003).





RESEARCH FOCUS

The purpose of this research study is to examine how high achieving women negotiate and construct their linguistic identities within the context of the university's Anglicised institutional culture and against the backdrop of South Africa's multilingual society.



METHOD

Data Collection:

- 19 individual interviews and 2 focus group interviews with the scholarship students.
- Questions: language of instruction during high school, university preparedness, challenges associated with their academic courses, and support systems available to them.

Data Analysis:

- An experience-centred and culturally orientated approach to narrative (Squire 2008) was adopted in which narratives include “all sequential and meaningful stories of personal experience that people produce” (Squire 2008, 42).
- The data was subjected to thematic content analysis in three broad stages.



FINDINGS

Language as an identity marker: maintenance and transgression

***Manka:** It's actually hard to speak Zulu sometimes I promise you, I don't know it's difficult. Like because now I am used to speaking in English and when I speak Zulu there's a bit of English in the Zulu and my dad is like, can you decide which language you want to speak.*



FINDINGS (cont.)

Interviewer: City life? Do you think language plays a role?

Pamela: I think it does because like I don't want to say

Interviewer: No, be honest there is no right or wrong anit like I'm saying...swers.

Pamela: Because I think they do have issues with English sometimes so...

Interviewer: They themselves have said that, that they - they went to high school where they were supposed to be taught in English but because the teacher themselves couldn't explain in English, they had to explain in their own language, and now they come to University...

Pamela: And when they get here and then like the lecturer.

Interviewer: Yes, and then the lecturer gives instructions in English and now they have to go to the lectures try and listen to what they are saying and try and interpret it in their own language. So do you do that?

Pamela: No.

Interviewer: So they do that.

Pamela: It's also that thing that like what language do you think in? I think in English. So I am so used to like speaking English.

Interviewer: That's a good question. And, why do you think you think in English if you like you said in the first question, the languages you mostly speak at home is Setswana?

Pamela: But, you see at home, so like I'm not used to it I spent most of the time at school, so when I am at home I actually speak in Setswana.



FINDINGS (cont.)

Interviewer: Do you speak any African languages?

Mpho: That 's the embarrassing part. It 's kind of awkward, I was raised in a situation where my mother she wanted the best for us, so she would do anything to put us in a kind of English westernised society, so I have known English my whole life - she had tried at home, but because she is working and she has no time and even with my father and then she never had the time to teach me. I can hear, especially when she shouts at me, that 's how I learned to understand, but I can 't speak it, I still have this problem. It sounds wide but yeah...

Interviewer: Yes, that is funny hey?

Mpho: But, I 'm still - I 'm making it 's one of the priorities that I made since last year to at least learn one black language. I can understand Felicia speaking it with a person because they find it funny.



FINDINGS (cont.)

Language as an ideology: Subversion and assimilation

Judith: *Eish like my group members. Like you know like we all speak the same language like we were all Vendas. I was the only girl in my group.*

Interviewer: *Oh.*

Judith: *And there were four guys - they were friends actually. So they didn't give each other space to, like they didn't listen to each other - they will say those horrible stuff to each other and we'd up - instead of doing the project they were doing something else because they were friends and all that. And I'll just get there during the meeting and they will tell me we're done already just go and type this, just go and do that.*

Interviewer: *Oh my word.*

Judith: *So like that's why I failed design. It was the project because the project is like 60% project, so ja I didn't work with the group and I didn't even know what was going on in the project. They will just submit and I will just get the marks like 20% for the first project and like 40 for the second project.*

Interviewer: *Did you go speak to your lecturer about it?*

Judith: *Ja, I did but it was in the second semester and he was like, "It's too late, you should have just raised that in the first semester" and all that. I only chose them because like we spoke the same language...*

Interviewer: *Oh.*

Judith: *So that's where I learnt. Ya in the future choosing a group you should not go to things like you know stuff, language and all that, no you should just work with the people who are easy to work with. Cos I knew other friends, like Indians or whatever that I use to work with when I was in first year but this time I was like I'm going to go with this group, so I learnt.*



FINDINGS (cont.)

***Pamela:** It was okay at the beginning it was Paman [tutor] or something and then we didn't understand because he didn't speak proper English ...*



DISCUSSION

1. Assimilation as a means to an end.
2. Agency and temporal location.
3. Intersections of social markers.



CLOSING REMARKS

- Participants engage in identity maintenance and transgression; and in subversion and assimilation of the dominant language ideology.
- Participants' identities are multifaceted.
- Paradoxical display of agency to ensure their academic success.



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COMMENTS? QUESTIONS?

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